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ABSTRACT

To assess the impact of public library preschool activities on children's reading readiness skills, a criterion reference test of reading readiness development was administered to 106 children entering kindergarten. Questionnaires were given to both parents and children to determine their uses and views of the library in their town. Comparison of the test scores and the questionnaires indicated that children who used the library scored higher on the reading readiness test and had a more positive view of the library than children who did not use the library. The study suggested that children with library experience demonstrated greater reading readiness than children without this experience. (Appendixes include parent and children questionnaires, and questionnaire and test results.) (Author/MM)

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Preschool Library Experience and Reading Readiness

by
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Abstract

Student proficiency in reading readiness skills was improved through the child's involvement of the pre-school activities in the town's public library. One-hundred six kindergarten children in a suburban district in New Jersey were used for this study. Test scores from an entrance criterion reference test were assessed for their reading readiness development. Then, questionaires were used to determine the parent and child uses and views of the library in their town. Comparison of the test scores and the questionaires indicated that the kindergarten children who did use the library did do better than those children who did not use the library , and these children also viewed reading and the library in positive ways. Therefore, the study suggests that kindergarten children who have had library experience demonstrate a greater reading readiness than those children who did not have this experience.

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Storytime in the library with young listeners may bring together three very important people: a librarian, a child, and a parent. Free from the emotional situations of the child's homelife, he is able to experience and discover new adventures through books and other valuable media. Each child may discover many things when books are shared: happiness, wonder, self-discovery, quiet solitude, companionship, understanding, and creativity. The librarian may reinforce or release the concepts expressed by Evelyn Wenzel, who stated, "out of books creatively experienced in early childhood emerges the most permanent memories of later years." If boys and girls are to gain these rich rewards, a librarian must be able to look upon each young listener as a make-up of many children, and to reaffirm the belief that each child has potential, a capacity for growth, and a need to be reached and respected for his views.

Growth of his views and appreciations come through motivation. Motivation is a key issue when children are listening to stories. The environment of the envolvement of <u>their</u> parents add to their enthusiasm of the library and the story involved. When parents attend storytelling sessions there is an opportunity to acquaint them with the effective use of books, the types of materials children like, and creative authors and illustrators. In some communities there are too few opportunities for parents participation in the

home with their children's reading. For these parents, participation in the storytelling program is invaluable. It is also to the child's benefit that the librarian visit with the parents, and at this time suggest follow-up activities for reading skills at home. Creative dramatics based on some of the stories of poems which were shared in the program is one type of follow-up activity which enhances skills. Others are: arts and crafts, reading guidance for children who have enjoyed that specific subject and would like to learn more on that subject, also short question-answer sessions either questions the librarian makes or else questions asked by the children.

Children gain respect for sources of information by their contacts with library and the librarian. The library fosters an appreciation of books and an enjoyment of reading. The librarian takes the child and must mold that individual, with the help of his/her parents, into a person who enjoys and learns through the use of books and media in the library.

The librarian must establish certain objectives she/he wishes to accomplish during a storytelling session with the pre-schoolers. Reading and readiness skills should be of upmost concern while devizing these objectives. A few such objectives could be:

For the Storyteller	For the Child
To share with mutual delights selected stories and poems from the field of literature for children	To have fun and to experience happiness
	To satisfy a need for play with verbal participation

For the Storyteller	For the Child
To stimulate the imagination	To satisfy a need for play with physical and emotional participation
To guide children in the art of aural and listening comprehension	To understand meaning and concepts and explain and expand appreciation through developmental skills
To demonstrate the importance of literature in the pre-school years	

The devizing of such objectives places in the librarian's mind how she/he will approach the children with the story and explanation of the story. It also gives some organizational pattern to the children for reasons of stories, their origins, and their concerns, and also has the children realize that stories are not always written for fun.

Good literature of any type is well written in terms of style, with content that meets persisting needs for self-understanding or for understanding others, or it offers a relaxing sensation in humor or fantasy. Smith (1978) referred to the elements universal and permanent- that is, good literature is universal in that it deals with the problems of mankind everywhere; permanent, in that it deals with those problems that persist all through history. When children learn this either from their parents and books or the librarina and books, then they will begin to understand what learning and schooling is all about. Good literature for children has many of the same qualities as good literature for adults. As stated by Arbuthnot(1966, p. 16), children's books, like adult books show "compationate love and kind of courage that is another phase of achievement." As the child matures, he/she

shifts from admiring to identification with the characters. It is important that the librarian in close collaboration with the parents ensure their child has the fulfillment of which the library and all its' media has to offer.

Hypothesis

To provide evidence concerning this topic, a study was conducted to determine the relative effects of the library on pre-school age children as related to the readiness of reading and achievement of reading abilities. It was hypothesized that kindergarten children who have been exposed to libraries and such experiences related to the library previous to school will demonstrate a greater readiness achievement than children who have not had this experience.

Instructional Procedures

Prior to the beginning of the school year, five classes consisting of 106 kindergarten children were developed in an elementary school in a suburban school district. Parents of the children were contacted to determine whether the parents would mind cooperating with the researcher because a study of library experience related to reading would be conducted, and their permission to include their child was sought.

Definitions

Readiness is defined by Hillerich (1977) as a continuously developing process, beginning with the abilities to perceive visually and auditorily and extending to abilities to function

receptively and expressively in language.

Specific Procedures

Names and addresses were gathered for the children to provide the researcher access to the children's parents. September test scores from a criterion reference test consisting of 20 questions used to determine readiness skills of kindergarten children were gathered and the scores evaluated determining percentage of children on reading readiness level.

Questionaires were devised (see Appendix A) and distributed to parents or guardians through the mail. If parents did not respond to the written questionares, calls were made to their homes and questions were answered in that manner. (All parents were cooperative and eager to hear the results of the study). Children were given their questionaries in school during each classes library time. The questions were asked to determine their sense of reading, books, and the use of the library by the researcher, who is also their librarian.

The questions on the questionares were given point scale values. The parent's questionaires had ten questions and each was worth ten points if answered positively toward the library, zero if answered negatively. The children's questionaires had five questions and each was worth twenty points if answered positively toward reading and the library and zero points if answered negatively.

A list was made in relation to how many children who scored high on the criterion referenced test also scored high

on the parent and child questionaires. To determine the average score of the questionaires, scores were added together and then divided by two in order to have a percentage score to compare.

Results

Table one illustrates the percentage of children who have had library experience compared to the children who have not had library experience. As table one shows, 58% of

Table I

Comparison of children with and without library experience

Library experience	No Library Experience
62 children	44 children
58%	42%

the children had previous library experience, and 42% of the children have not had library experience. This suggests that in this district more than half of the children were able to receive library experience than those who could not receive the experience.

As mentioned earlier, Smith explains that library experience is beneficial for all children, and children should be exposed to libraries, books, and reading as much as possible. Extrapolating this trend of kindergarten children, it is not surprising that our data show more children receiving library experience.

Table two illustrates the variation of criterion

Table II

Criterion Reference Test scores in comparison with library experience

CRT SCORES	QUESTIONAIRE SCORES 5.	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100
10								1												
20				1	1	1	1	1												
30		1		2	1	1	2		1											
40						5	1	3		2	1									
50						2	1	1				3								
60						1				1	1			2			1		1	1
70						2		1			2	1	2					3		
80								2				2		1	1		2	5	2	1
90												1		2		5	4	9		2
100																2	2	7	1	5

*Each number represents the number of children in relation to their scores.

reference test scores in relation to library experience gathered through the parent and child questionaires. (A note is to be made that the questionaires were on a point scale and the points were added together and divided by two to find the average score.) As noted from this table the children who had low scores on the criterion reference test also had low scores on their average score of library expereince. For example, Criterion reference test: 10% Library experience 40%. The children who had high scores on the criterion reference test, also had high scores on the library experience percentages. The wide span of scores on the Criterion reference test exposes the varying degree of achievement by the kindergarten children.

Table three illustrates the mean and standard deviation of all the kindergarten children in relation of their criterion reference test to their library experience. As

Table III

Mean and standard deviation of library experience related to test scores.

	Criterion reference test	Library Experience
Mean	69.2	67.1
Standard Deviation	42.04	24.96

shown, the mean of each form of data shows that the children in this community when exposed to library experience also experienced high test scores with the mean being almost 70. Test and questionaire scores will be found in Appendix B.

Conclusions & Implications

While it is of interest in reading instruction and library service to learn that the essence of library experience does enhance reading readiness skills as defined in this study and as determined by the comparison of the criterion reference test scores to the experience of the library by the kindergarten children, the actual carry-over of the library experience related to the readiness of these kindergarten children's reading is especially of interest. The implication is that instruction in the library services provided by the library for pre-school children is of invaluable aid in producing reading readiness necessary for kindergarten children in reading. The conclusion that library experience has a positive effect on the readiness skills is indicated by the differences produced by the procedures used in this study. The results confirm the finding of this study, and tends to support the inference that reading readiness skills can be enhanced by the use of the library and such library instruction and orientation.

The results of this study do indicate that children who have had library experience prior to kindergarten have achieved better results on readiness tests than children who have not had the library experience.

Review of Related Research

We have said as parents, teachers, and librarians that since in our society reading is a necessary tool for living, the ability to read is a prerequisite to functioning in school, on the job, in the whole world. Therefore, children must read. Books offer more than pleasure. Despite all the distractions of the child's busy day, books unlock new and exciting worlds of thought, and emotion for them which cannot be reached in any other way.

Good readers are not made by parental and librarian wishing. They are made by the child's own private, personal desires, plus ready access to books that will fulfill these, plus his facility with the skill of reading.

In the last ten years, educators- including children's librarians- have become increasingly aware of the impact of early learning on the development of intellectual ability. The services of the library are those which will enhance these abilities. The work of Benjamin Bloom at the University of Chicago suggests that half the variation in general school achievement can be predicted on the basis of characteristics that can be measured at the third grade level. The intellectual development theory of Piaget and the research done in the sixties stress the importance of the early years in a child's cognitive development. Burton L. White, director of the Pre-School Project of Harvard's Graduate School of Education, has recently completed a book, The First Three Years of Life (Prentice-Hall, 1975), drawing on his

extensive research in child development. Specific educational capabilities and tasks are identified and can help parents and educators recognize and facilitate progress toward a child's greatest intellectual potential. Libraries provide a natural setting for early childhood programs. Pre-school story programs have been a part of the public library's children's services for almost as long as the agency has existed. Librarians are aware of child develpoment stages from infancy through early education, the effect of the child's environment on the rate of intellectual growth, the great need for positive experiences with media and with people in the development of language and the important relationships between faculty in language usage and the acquisition of reading skills.

In deciding which materials will enhance the learning process the early childhood media specialist knows that the visual, tactile, and auditory senses are very important. The librarian recognizes that parents need to be involved in any education program, since they can provide special insights into the child's needs and can establish a working home-learning environment.

A variety of skills can be strengthened by using various library materials. The majority of parents seek books that will give their children pleasure. Children readily enjoy the sound and meaning of words and the appearance and interpretive qualities of illustrations. Parents also seek "situation" books that fulfill a specific requirement to introduce, explain, or familiarize a child with an event, state of being, or any other situation. Information books are another category. Such books range from the ABC's, to facts about animals, how to make a doll house (sequence instructions). Pre-schoolers enjoy these books since they deal with specific subject areas and can reinforce pleasureable experiences, such as a trip to the zoo, or a new pet.

Another category is the participation books. These books

are enjoyable and actively involve the children. They may call for visual or verbal responses, as in Look Again (Macmillan, 1976), where children guess the identity of something seen through a hole. The response may not come immediately, it may take a few minutes. Involvement may come after a book has been read and is being discussed. Different types of questions, as described in Bloom's taxonomy can be used to get the children thinking, using the books, information, their own experiences, and in general discussing among themselves to answer questions raised by the educator or by their peers.

Research, according to Larrick (1975), has proved not only that beginning the book habit at an early age increases the chances for educational success, but also that the children who develop a lifelong habit of reading are usually those accustomed to being read to, to seeing their parents read, and to having reading materials in the homes.

In the 1960's Delores Durkin studied children in Oakland, California, and in New York City who had learned to read before they entered school and compared them with other children of comparable intelligence who had not. Then she followed these groups of children through several years of school. Her findings showed that early readers not only began significantly ahead of the other children, but stayed ahead. The others never caught up.

Durkin's research project clearly suggests that parents and the environment can make a critically important difference in a child's intellectual growth and development. Spending time with their children, reading to them, taking them to the library for story hours or book talks, and increasing the amount of books they are exposed to, helped these children gain considerably in their intellectual growth.

Many adults understand the importance of reading aloud to young children who cannot yet read. But, too often these same adults no more think of reading aloud to the child who has learned to read. This is a sad mistake. Reading aloud

should continue all through the school years, for many reasons as Augusta Baker, a Coordinator of Children's Services for the New York Public Library states:

"1. To stop read-aloud sessions of the pre-school years ends a rich shared experience. The shared experience that reading aloud provides, creates a genuine bond in a group of diverse children that is unlikely to occur any other way. Storytime at the library does this well.

2. Being read to promotes, rather than retards, children's desire to read independently. One reason that reading a book or story works so well to motivate independent reading is that learning to read is difficult and often frustrating. Going on to read more and more challenging books means repeatedly risking failure. Hearing a first-rate story read aloud makes the rewards of sticking to it clear and tangible.

3. Being read to fosters improvement of children's independent reading skills. Studies of first and second grade and fourth through sixth graders have demonstrated that children who are read aloud to on a regular basis over a period of several months show significant gains in reading comprehension, decoding, skills in vocabulary. (McCormick, 1977) The gains were greatest for disadvantaged students but not limited to them -all the children benefited compared to the control groups, who were only read to occasionally or not at all.

Besides making children more eager to tackle the tasks involved in learning to read, hearing stories read gets children used to the written language they will meet in books, which is different from spoken language.

4. All through their school years, young people can enjoy listening to books that would be too difficult for them to read on their own. Listening experiences like these are especially valuable for the student whose home language is not English and for children whose chief

exposure to English comes from the T.V. set.

5. Wonderful books that are "hard to get into" are more accessible when read aloud.

6. For the poor students whose inability to read has barred him or her from access to stimulating material in every subject, there is no substitute for reading aloud.

7. A significant number of children will always group material auditorially better than visually (Durrell).

8. Studies have shown that reading aloud to children significantly broadens their reading interests and tastes.

9. Seeing adults reading with enjoyment increases the chances that children will become life-long readers."

Therefore, ending story time with children who have begun to read, might make reading a chore that people do, instead of a shared, caring experience.

Several researchers have examined the specific skills that children acquire when "reading" wordless picture books. Larrick (1976) suggests that pre-schoolers learn how to handle books, move their eyes from left to right as they turn the pages, and expand oral language skills as they describe what they see. According to Delger (1979), wordless books can be used to develop cognitive and affective skills important for beginning reading. Picture books without words ensure successful "reading" experiences, no-fail encounters that help extablish a positive attitude toward books. In addition, children learn to "read" for literal and inferential messages, evaluate a character's actions, understand the interrelationship of concepts presented, and increase vocabulary. The various thinking strategies used prepare children for formal reading.

Abrahamson (1981) suggests that wordless picture books are a good diagnostic tool. As the child "reads" the story, the teacher gains insight into the student's language competence. In addition, the books can be used with a

language experience approach to reading and writing. Beginning readers can tell the story from the pictures, and a single word, phrase, or sentence can be written about the story. D'Angelo (1979) discusses possible ways that both younger and older students benefit in writing about wordless picture books.

Read and Smith (1982), emphasizes the importance of visual literacy, discuss strong detail, symbolism, and space and color as elements which create the tone of the wordless story. Reading skills inherent in the books include sequencing, noting details, determining the main idea, making inferences, drawing conclusions, noting cause and effect, and making judgements. Wordless picture books also give the child opportunity to predicy outcomes (Arthur, 1982).

Wordless picture books can be used with any age child to begin the readiness level of reading or to the extreme of noting specific details and sophistication of character's actions. Libraries offer many books and experiences for these children to help them become interested, motivated readers.

A study researched by Bailey (1970) indictes that the psycholinguistic abilities of disadvantaged first grade students improved after participation in a library resource program. One experimental group and one control group, each consisting of 25 disadvantaged first-grade students from a low income community were selected. The mental ages of the children were ascertained through the Pinter-Cunningham Primary Ability Test. The experimental group participated in a libraryprogram of activities employing children's books and story telling, one hour a day for twelve weeks; the control group did not. Results indicated that verbal expressions of ideas improved and that a significant increase in language ability was attained by the children in the experimental group. The results also indicated

improvement in their verbal expression and a significant increase in their language ability.

Clearly, the library offers great reinforcement and individualism of instruction in the basic language skills of reading and writing; and through them, learning can be enhanced in all other academic subjects. Library service is not an optional enrichment component, it addresses itself to basic literacy.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Parent's Questionaire:

1. Do you take your child to the library? ___ yes___no

2. How many times a week or month does your child visit the public library? ___week ____month

3. When you and your child visit the library, what types of media does he/she take out?

___books ___games
___records ___films
___tapes ___magazines
___other (explain)

4. Does your child own a library card? ___yes ___no

5. Do you own a library card? ___yes ___no

6. Does your child bring the books home from the library and "read" them immediately? ___yes ___no

7. Can your child read these books by himself/herself? ___yes ___no

8. How much time do you spend reading a book, magazine, cereal box, etc. to your child a day?

____15 minutes
____1/2 hour
____1 hour
____1 1/2 hours
____ more than 1 1/2 hours

9. Does your child read different things to you? ___yes ___no

10. Do you and your child discuss what has been read that day? ___yes ___no

Children's Questionaire:

1. Do you go to the public library? Who do you go with to the library?

2. What do you do when you go to the public library?

3. Why do you think there are libraries for us to visit?

4. What types of books do you like to listen to or read yourself?

5. What do you think a librarian is for in the library?

(This questionaire was asked orally, and the answers written by the researcher.)

Appendix B

The following is a chart of the results of the scores of the criterion reference test and the average of the questionaires. X denotes the criterion reference test, and Y denotes the library questionarie average.

X	X^2	Y	Y^2
90	8100	85	7225
90	8100	90	8100
30	900	35	1225
40	1600	30	900
90	8100	90	8100
80	6400	75	5625
100	10000	90	8100
80	6400	60	3600
100	10000	90	8100
80	6400	90	8100
70	4900	65	4225
90	8100	70	4900
40	1600	30	900
30	900	20	400
50	2500	60	3600
70	4900	90	8100
100	10000	100	10000
100	10000	100	10000
100	10000	100	10000
80	6400	90	8100
90	8100	70	4900
60	3600	40	1600
50	2500	35	1225
60	3600	85	7225
70	4900	60	3600
80	6400	90	8100
90	8100	85	7225
90	8100	80	6400
20	400	35	1225
100	10000	85	7225
90	8100	90	8100
90	8100	90	8100
80	6400	70	4900
60	3600	50	2500
50	2500	40	1600
40	1600	50	2500
40	1600	55	3025
100	10000	95	9025
100	10000	80	6400
90	8100	90	8100
80	6400	100	10000
80	6400	85	7225

X	X^2	Y	Y^2
70	4900	90	8100
20	400	20	400
60	3600	55	3025
100	10000	85	7225
30	900	45	2025
40	1600	40	1600
90	8100	60	3600
90	8100	90	8100
100	10000	90	8100
40	1600	35	1225
10	100	40	1600
20	400	25	625
40	1600	30	900
60	3600	100	10000
80	6400	40	1600
30	900	35	1225
100	10000	100	10000
90	8100	90	8100
90	8100	80	6400
70	4900	55	3025
100	10000	90	8100
80	6400	90	8100
70	4900	55	3025
60	3600	70	4900
30	900	20	400
50	2500	30	900
90	8100	90	8100
60	3600	95	9025
50	2500	60	3600
60	3600	70	4900
80	6400	85	7225
100	10000	90	8100
90	8100	80	6400
70	4900	65	4225
40	1600	40	1600
30	900	25	625
20	400	30	900
100	10000	90	8100
80	6400	95	9025
70	4900	90	8100
80	6400	95	9025
90	8100	85	7225
90	9100	85	7225
30	900	30	900
90	8100	80	6400
80	6400	90	8100
90	8100	100	10000
70	4900	30	900
90	8100	100	10000
40	1600	50	2500
50	2500	60	3600
60	3600	30	900

X	X^2	Y	Y^2
100	10000	100	10000
80	6400	60	3600
100	10000	80	6400
100	10000	80	6400
90	8100	90	8100
40	1600	30	900
50	2500	30	900
30	900	10	100
40	1600	30	900
20	400	40	1600
40	1600	40	1600
100	10000	90	8100